

HB 371

Stearns Testimony

**Hearing before House Appropriations
Room 102**

Thursday, February 8, on adjournment

The Regents have placed the highest priority on affordability, and have committed to supporting the Governor's budget for higher education. This funding, if directed to MSU, would exceed the executive budget, and therefore I cannot stand in support of the appropriation as currently presented in this bill.

I can, however, wholeheartedly support the importance of the work being performed as a part of the Wired grant.

This was a cooperative effort that took long hours of work by key members of the Governor's Office and my staff. It is having an impact on the 32 counties and reservations in the Wired Region...and we are essentially still in our first year.

MMEC, which will receive some of the funding in this bill, is an extension center housed on the MSU campus in Bozeman. They have an exceptional track record of achieving results, as measured by:

Jobs created

Jobs retained

Profits increased

Businesses that have grown (and those that have stayed in business)

Reductions in costs

We are proud of the accomplishments that this center has achieved in providing an essential outreach service to companies across the state. They get the job done...and turn out the results.

For that reason, I can say with confidence that they are well positioned to expand their role in Montana's economic development efforts.